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OF

NATHANIEL THAYER, A.M.

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Rev. F. G. Peabody
with the sincere regards of
C. W. Thayer

A. J. Wilkins, Boston

MEMOIR

OF

NATHANIEL THAYER, A.M.

BY

GEORGE E. ELLIS.

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Massachusetts Historical Society.

At the Monthly Meeting, March 8, 1883, —

Resolved, That the Massachusetts Historical Society have heard with deep regret of the death of their distinguished and respected associate, Nathaniel Thayer, Esq., and that a Memoir of him be prepared for some future volume of our Proceedings.

Resolved, That the Memoir of Mr. Thayer be committed to Dr. George E. Ellis.

MEMOIR.

THE ancestors of the Thayer family in Massachusetts came here with the earliest colonists from England. We find Thomas Tayer, his wife Margerey, and three sons, settled in Old Braintree about 1630. He was accompanied, or soon followed, by his brother Richard. They came from Thornbury, Gloucestershire, England: the name is found on the old records of the place, but is now extinct there. The grandchildren of the first Thomas inserted the letter *h* in the name, which the descendants have ever since adopted. Like so many of the original New England families, the branches of it became numerous and fruitful, extending by marriage into wide genealogical connections.[1] It is safe to say of all such families of our early stock, with their branches and affiliations, that in their generations they present us the names of serviceable and honored persons—often conspicuously so—who have filled all the varied callings, occupations, and places needed, and open to those fit for them, in a thrifty and prosperous community, steadily advancing from its days of small things, by frugal living, laborious toil, and ambitious enterprises, to the higher planes of wealth, culture, and refinement. Husbandmen and Indian fighters; ministers, schoolmasters, and

[1] Family Memorial, part ii. Genealogy of Ephraim and Sarah Thayer, by Elisha Thayer of Dedham: Hingham, 1835. Memorials of the Thayer Name from the Massachusetts Colony of Weymouth and Braintree, Richard and Thomas Thayer and their Descendants, by Bezaleel Thayer: Oswego, 1874. N. E. Hist. Geneal. Register, vol. xxxvii. p. 84; and the number for October, 1883, p. 413.

physicians; blacksmiths, millers, carpenters, craftsmen, and mechanics, plying every tool; members of the General Court and selectmen; military and judicial officers; and politicians, equal to dealing with national interests, — all these appear, in picturesqueness, variety, homely utility, and grave dignity, in our genealogical volumes.

The Thayer family, instead of being exceptional as for any limitation, has exhausted and enriched the list. Two of its members are incidentally worthy of special mention. To one from this original Puritan stock belongs the distinction of having been the priest of the first regularly organized Church Society of Roman Catholics in Boston. This was John Thayer, a son of Cornelius Thayer who was a brother of the great-grandfather of Mr. Nathaniel Thayer. John Thayer, though his parents were of Braintree, was born in Boston, May 15, 1758. Though not a graduate of the college, he was trained for the Congregational ministry, and served for a time as chaplain to Governor John Hancock. While travelling in Europe in 1781–83, he accepted in Rome the authority of the Church, and was baptized in its communion. After pursuing his education in the Seminary of St. Sulpice, in Paris, he was ordained as deacon and priest, returned to this country laden with books, and was sent by Dr. Carroll of Baltimore on a mission to Boston in January, 1790. Political disturbances at home had driven hither at the time a few educated Frenchmen, who, with some Irish and other foreigners here, made up a small congregation. Such disciples had heretofore been ministered to only by two priests transiently visiting Boston. Notwithstanding some manifestations of natural disapprobation, Father Thayer found friends and helpers among Protestants. He gratefully mentions the kindness of the Customs officers in admitting his books and church furniture free of duty. The disused Huguenot Chapel in School Street was fitted up for his use, and there he faithfully and peacefully performed his priestly offices. He sustained his part in some

controversial warfare through the press. He afterward did missionary service in Kentucky, and died in Limerick, Ireland, 1813.[1]

Another of the Thayer family, born in the last century, deserving special mention, was Sylvanus Thayer. He was born in 1785, in Braintree, where he died, Sept. 7, 1872. He graduated from Dartmouth College in 1808, "the most brilliant boy in his class," and immediately entered the Engineer Service of the United States, being Chief Engineer in the last war with Great Britain. He was the most efficient organizer of the United States Military Academy at West Point, and from 1817 to 1833 its highly honored and distinguished Superintendent. After his resignation, which was with difficulty allowed, he had charge of the fortifications in Boston Harbor. At his death, from the savings of a frugal life he left a generous sum for building and endowing a free academy in his native town. A noble monument was reared and dedicated to the memory of Brigadier-General Sylvanus Thayer at West Point, June 11, 1883.[2]

Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, in his tribute before this Society to Ralph Waldo Emerson, said: "A New Englander has a right to feel happy, if not proud, if he can quarter his coat-of-arms with the bands of an ancestry of clergymen, as representing the true Brahminism of New England." This remark has often found illustrations of its truth in the now voluminous pages of our published Collections and Proceedings.

[1] See Pattee's "History of Old Braintree and Quincy," p. 272, where are given two letters of Father Thayer. "Memorial History of Boston," vol. iii. chap. xiv. In that pleasant, gossipy volume, "Recollections of Samuel Breck," beginning a few years preceding the war of our Revolution, the writer mentions an interview which he had with Thayer in his college in Paris in 1787. Breck himself, temporarily at least, avowed himself a convert to the Church, and in that character promised assistance to Thayer when he should reach Boston on his mission. On his arrival Breck was faithful to his promise, though in the mean while he says he had relapsed into Protestantism. Pp. 84, 116, 117.

[2] An admirable biographical sketch of the character and career of this honored man was delivered on the occasion by his devoted friend, General George W. Cullum.

These abound in memoirs of men of high eminence and service in their several generations, whose lineage and training connect them with our country parsonages. We may safely affirm that a considerable majority of those who have been conspicuous, honored, and successful in all the varied ranges of life in New England, during its past centuries and till quite recent times, had near kinship with the ministerial profession. It is interesting to note this element in our local history, because some marked and rapid changes among us, in circumstances, conditions, and relative professions, indicate that what was so characteristic in our earlier generations is not likely to be perpetual. The New England parsonage is already an antiquity. The relative position, the rank, the standard of character, acquisition, and social and professional influence of its occupant, the range of its hospitalities, the quality of its most welcome guests, if not all reduced in measure and dignity, are not so distinctive and effective as once they were. The tone, the discipline, the conversation of parents and guests in those favored homes were a good part of the education of the children, and were peculiarly favorable and stimulating. Graces and virtues, ambitions and energies, were there taught and tested such as insure success in all their higher exertion. Where any quickening capacity, genius, or intellectual endowment had shown its germ in the parent stock, paternal or maternal, in the country parsonage, the law of heredity insured its presence in the descendants.

Nathaniel Thayer, a brother of the priest already mentioned, was born in Boston, July 17, 1710. He married here Ruth, a sister of the Rev. Dr. Andrew Eliot, minister of the New North Church in Boston from 1742 till his death in 1778. He remained in the town during its occupancy by the British army in our Revolutionary War. The eldest child of these parents was the Rev. Ebenezer Thayer, born in Boston, July 16, 1734; graduated at Harvard College in 1753; and settled as the minister of Hampton, New Hampshire, from 1766 to his

death in 1792. His wife, Martha Cotton, was a daughter of the Rev. John Cotton, of Newton, and a direct descendant of the minister of the First Church in Boston. These were the parents of the Rev. Nathaniel Thayer, D.D., who graduated at Harvard College in 1789, and was settled in the ministry at Lancaster, Massachusetts, in 1793, till his death in 1840. He married Sarah, a daughter of the Hon. Christopher Toppan, of Hampton. They were the parents of eight children; the seventh of which, Nathaniel, the subject of this memoir, was born in Lancaster, Sept. 11, 1808. He would have regarded any memorial sketch of himself, however brief, as wholly defective if it failed to pay some adequate tribute of high respect and honor to his father, for whom his filial reverence and fondest attachment all through life manifested themselves so tenderly and so attractively; holding him by still living obligations long after his father's decease, and prompting and directing a conspicuous object of his munificence, as well as countless deeds of benevolence.

Dr. Nathaniel Thayer and his home in Lancaster answered to the type of country minister and rural parsonage which were had in view in a preceding paragraph. They are pleasant realities of our New England past, to be reproduced no more. Here was a delightful town of hills and valleys, with a meandering river of two branches, and many brooks and ponds, thirty-five miles from Boston. It was the fairest among the similar villages and towns which surrounded it. It throve by all the industries of farm, manufactory, and work-bench. Its homes were scenes of domestic duty and comfort. Its population, during the latter part of Dr. Thayer's long ministry of nearly half a century, was about two thousand. These all were his parishioners, "his flock." There was in the town but a single religious society, but a single centre for religious instruction and worship, — twice on the Lord's day, with an occasional lecture. In later years there was found necessary in Lancaster, as in most of our populous towns, a public farm,

with proper buildings, as a refuge for a few unfortunate, impoverished, lonely, or decrepit persons. These, too, were Dr. Thayer's parishioners. At due intervals, on closing his afternoon duties in the meeting-house, he would announce that services would be immediately held at this refuge, whither he and his wife would drive on the errand of sympathy. The condition of each and of all his parishioners was intimately known to him. He had their respect and confidence, and they profited by his word and deed.

Dr. Thayer must be remembered in connection with a class of his brethren in the ministry whose position, circumstances, views, and duties were like his own, — sole ministers in single towns, with no sectarian rivalry or discord near them. They retained what was best — indeed, they aimed to retain all that was good — in the traditions, the responsibilities and the dignities of their profession. They respected their lineage, and recognized an historic trust in the Christian religion and its ministry. Those who were nearest in opinion and sympathy with Dr. Thayer had softened, modified, liberalized some of the tenets of their traditional creed, without losing hold or heart for Christian verities or sanctities. Their preaching was didactic and hortatory, concerned with the duties and virtues and graces of daily and domestic life, with lessons that recognized its solemnities. They kept a watching and a cheerful eye on the children growing up in the households. They were the guardians, supervisors, constant visitors, and examiners of the public schools, and made friends and found friends in good books. There was nothing priestly, sacerdotal, scarcely anything ecclesiastical, in assumption or function, in their offices. "Ministers of the word" was their preferred designation; and instead of a gradation of hierarchical titles, they put themselves on an equality of discipleship with each other and their people as "brethren." Harvard College, the Alma Mater of all of them, was the centre of their intellectual and professional interest, as the legacy of English-bred scholars, their fathers.

The special friends and intimates of Dr. Thayer, in college or later, were men of an honored and cherished remembrance: President Kirkland and William Emerson, his classmates; Thatcher, Freeman, and Lowell of Boston; Holmes of Cambridge, Professor Ware, Osgood of Medford, Bancroft of Worcester, Ripley of Concord, and Allen of Northborough. He held the place of honor in his ministerial association. Before his settlement at Lancaster he had been an instructor at Harvard, had been invited to the society in Church Green, Boston, and had been a private teacher in the family of Colonel Timothy Pickering, Secretary of War and of State. While on a journey for his health, Dr. Thayer died at Rochester, New York, June 23, 1840.

The other children of the family who lived to maturity — with whom the subject of this Memoir grew up, all being his elders, some of whom will be mentioned again — were: Martha, who married John Marston, Esq., United States Consul at Palermo, Sicily; Mary Ann; John Eliot; and Christopher Toppan, for twenty-five years minister of the First Church in Beverly. These are all deceased.

The tenure of office for a minister in Dr. Thayer's time was for life. If age or infirmity disabled him for duty, he was provided with a colleague. Dr. Thayer himself had sustained that relation for more than two years with his predecessor, who died at the age of eighty, after a service of forty-eight years. The line of faithful village pastors in Lancaster began in the early days of the colony, and amid the perils and desolations of Indian warfare. The well-known narrative of the wife of the first minister, Mrs. Rowlandson, of her captivity by the Indians in their disastrous attack on the town in 1676, when the fortified parsonage and most of the humble cabins in the settlement were burned, and the place for some years abandoned, was one of the New England classics of the period.[1] Dr. Thayer's parsonage was near the site of this

[1] Mrs. Rowlandson's Narrative, which had appeared in eleven editions — in another one, printed in 1828, was illustrated with valuable notes by Joseph

wrecked home of his predecessor. His early years of service were in frugal days of simple living, before the multiplication of appliances and luxuries. His salary for his whole ministry of nearly half a century did not amount to half that number of thousands of dollars. A farm and a wood-lot, with some slight patrimony, assured him all the conditions of comfort and competency. Like all his ministerial brethren, he sent one son to college, and would doubtless have sent them all, had they desired it. Like most of his brethren, likewise, he found in the mother of his children one of those admirable women, fit not only to aid, but to prompt every wifely and maternal obligation in domestic and parental duty. Those ministers' wives, fully as much as their husbands, were the property, for all excellent service of interest and oversight, of their parishioners. In dignity and graces, in culture and accomplishments, and in all exemplary qualities for the home and for social relations, Mrs. Thayer was the crown of her husband and the revered and beloved guide of her children.

It was in such a home and with such guardians that the subject of this Memoir was trained to manhood. That he was a healthful and a happy boy, of rural blood and fibre, acquainted with farm-work and fond of roaming in the woods, and a genial companion of those who were growing up around him, will appear when a later reference is made to his strong attachment to his native place and its people. In his youth the town had many citizens and families of comfortable resources, intelligence, and culture, and in professional service. As a matter of course there was an academy, and teachers of the highest qualities, among whom it is enough to mention such afterwards distinguished men as Jared Sparks and George B. Emerson. Mr. Thayer enjoyed peculiar ad-

Willard, Esq., of Lancaster — is the earliest in the series of such relations of captives taken by the Indians, who afterwards escaped or were ransomed. The savages, to the estimated number of fifteen hundred, led by King Philip, assaulted and destroyed the rural hamlet, Feb. 10, 1676. Her husband had gone to Boston at the time of the assault to procure aid for the settlement. She was in captivity about twelve weeks.

vantages in his relations to his teachers, because of their special intimacy at the parsonage. Each passing year brought to that centre of the best influences a succession of guests and visitors, from whose conversation and manners there was much to be learned by young listeners and observers. The intimates of Mr. Thayer all through his life were always impressed by the signs that though the tenor and occupations of his business activity drew him away from the pursuits of literature and science, he was ever an intelligent and appreciative companion of the foremost and most accomplished masters in those pursuits. His munificent patronage of literary and scientific men made him essentially a fellow of them.

His brother John Eliot Thayer, five years his elder, had preceded him in going to Boston to enter upon a business life. The capital of both the brothers was integrity and capacity. To these, largely helped indeed by signally favorable opportunities, judiciously improved, they were indebted for a wonderful success, such as is gained only by the few, while the many fail in full or in degree. When Nathaniel Thayer went to Boston, his main purpose first was to secure a business training. This he found, first in a clerkship, and then in a partnership in mercantile firms. From the first he was choice and careful in forming his social relations, and in prudential and conscientious watchfulness of character. He attached himself to the ministry of the Rev. Henry Ware, Jr., minister of the Second Church. His name appears on its records as sharing in its works of religion and benevolence. His brother John having established himself successfully as a banker and broker, with the prospect of a steadily extending business, received him into partnership in 1834, under the firm of John E. Thayer & Brother. The connection continued till the death of the elder in 1857. The acquisitions of the firm and the property which accrued to the survivor were large for the date and the then existing state of the business world. They were small, however, compared with those which

afterwards, in the rapid development of the material interests of the country, were gathered by the younger brother. His success was so signal, the means of it were so connected with the development of the prosperity of our whole country, and the generous use which he made of it was so beneficial to this community, as to call for some recognition here of the high reponsibilities of men of wealth.

Mr. Thayer left at his decease the largest fortune that had ever been accumulated in this city or State. There may have been a single exception to this in the case of an individual who had removed from this city to another State before his death. If Mr. Thayer had been told at his start in life that such would be the result of his business activity, he would have marvelled at, if not mistrusted, the prophecy. There have been cases in which bold and keenly calculating men have set before them that aim of supreme success in accumulation, and, keeping it hopefully and resolutely in view, have wrought earnestly to accomplish it. Probably, however, the idea had never presented itself consciously to the mind of Mr. Thayer. His temperament and views of life were not in harmony with it. His kind and lavish generosity and munificence in giving would alone distinguish him from those who, while always seeking for more, keep a close hold upon what they have won. Mr. Thayer's fortune was the growth of natural processes; it was largely the accretion of his latest years, an accumulation on itself, from reproductive seed and harvests. There is, therefore, an historical interest, apart from its individual bearings, in this instance of the growing up of a vast fortune in a thrifty and exceedingly prosperous community. Indeed, the whole subject of the development and accumulation of wealth, in lesser or in greater volume, in this particular community carries with it much that is of peculiar interest and importance in any historical review of the economic progress of this section of our country in its relations to the whole of which it is so prospered a part.

We may trace in a series, through the two and a half centuries since the region around us was a wilderness, the sources and means by which alike a general accumulation and enrichment of property for all, and the towering fortunes of individuals have accrued here. The first method in the series by which our whole local community and the most prospered individuals in it have been enriched, was by commercial and mercantile enterprise. In fact, for more than a century this was the only agency for our development and improvement. It began with the first settlement of the colony, in interchanges by the high seas of the products of the wilderness and the fisheries for those of the West Indies, and it steadily expanded into a world-wide traffic over all oceans. It was the most generous and healthful, as well as the most profitable and rewarding of all the means of thrift. It promoted a friendly intercourse between widely severed peoples, and an exchange of necessities and luxuries. It employed shipbuilders and riggers and other craftsmen, and trained a race of able and accomplished seamen. It opened rills from the ocean which bore comforts and valuable appliances to homes deep in wildernesses.

The second agency in historic course for the development and enrichment of our community was by great manufacturing enterprises, promoted by joint capital. These also made a large general distribution of the means of comfort and luxury among the whole community, while the largest gains of wealth from them accrued to a comparatively few favored individuals. Incidental to the development of these industries were the inventions and discoveries, by men of practical skill and mechanical genius, of an infinite and marvellous variety of devices, tools, implements, methods, processes, and combinations, most of which, by our patent laws, could be turned to securing vast profits. The Patent Office at Washington shows, on its crowded tables and in its cases, the gatherings, in an amazingly miscellaneous collection, of all these ingenuities and

devices. Large fortunes have been secured to individuals by their patented ownership of some implement, process, or combination, some stupendous machine, a tool, or an application of inventive mechanical skill in some trivial instrument for facilitating the homeliest forms of labor. Between reaping and threshing machines, and sewing machines, for the vast fields of the prairies, and the toils of the seamstress in millions of households, come in somewhere in the series the apple-parer and the little implement by which blinded eyes may thread a needle. The telephone bears a similar relation to these ingenuities to that which the century plant bears to garden flowers. And for each of these myriad devices either the inventor himself, or another who shows equal adroitness in appropriating its value, turns a fortune. Again, in the rapid development and enrichment of a community like our own, the extraordinary appreciation of value in parcels of real estate, with wise investment of proceeds, has been of large profit to favored ones.

But all the means and sources for the accumulation of large wealth by individuals in this and some other cities of our country, which have been mentioned, have been comparatively moderate in their results, in view of those which have accompanied the vast operations of the banking and brokerage business consequent upon the introduction of the railroad system for travel and traffic over the ever-extending expanses of our territory. Pecuniary wealth has accrued here from the processes by which all kinds of material wealth have been developed. After the first third of this century had passed, the successive longitudinal lines which have in turn marked for us what is called the "West" had begun to disclose their vast resources and capabilities. In turning these to use, with all the incidental advantages of improvement and intercourse which would follow, everything depended upon facilitating development and communication. The very richness of the soil of those regions impeded and presented obstacles to the turning of its products to marketable profit. The laden carts

sunk to the hubs of their wheels in the loamy mould. For a large part of the year the abounding rivers and lakes were not navigable. The railroads offered their promise of relief and profit just at the right time. But there was an interposed condition still to be met; and as it was one which in the way of bargain offered equal advantages to the two parties concerned, it was readily provided for. The East and the West were to be alike benefited by the opening of intercourse and traffic between the two sections of the country, and both, therefore, were bound to furnish the needful means. As the brothers Thayer were so largely, intelligently, and profitably concerned in the legitimate and wise enterprises having in view these ends, a reference to them is quite in place here. If either of them had had leisure from their busily occupied lives to have turned the entries in their ledgers into historical narrative, he might have written for us some very instructive chapters upon the development of our country. The West at the time was not rich in pecuniary capital, for which it had to look for loans from the East. The earliest of the loans advanced by the East for opening railroads at the West were legitimate and judicious, and proved profitable to the investors. Road-beds were graded, constructed, and ironed for the most part by the combined resources, small or more considerable, of the owners of territory on their route and at their termini. These resources, however, were exhausted before the necessary rolling-stock, repair-shops, and stations were provided for. As soon as the roads could come into operation, returns would steadily come in in increasing volume. The parties most interested proceeded to borrow what was still needed by bonds pledging all the property and the needful portion of the income of the roads for security of principal and interest of the loan. These bonds, sold in large blocks to capitalists at a discount, enabled them to distribute them at a premium; and all who were concerned in these honest dealings received a proportionate advantage. But after

the mischievous fashion of our country — and of all other countries, according to their opportunities — of overdoing and of misdoing in such matters, elements neither judicious nor legitimate soon obtruded themselves in these transactions connected with the constructing and mortgaging of railroads. Rival enterprises, with their jealousies, sharp schemings and unscrupulous or hazardous manœuvres, very soon came in to pervert, embarrass, or bring under distrust this honest and safe method of business. Fraud and folly were sure to assert their places in the hands of avaricious or reckless men. The proceeds of the sale of bonds or mortgages were used instead of capital stock for the construction and equipment of roads, and thus were made the sole security, so far as they were any security at all, for loans on what had only an imaginary existence. The risks which trustful investors thus hazarded had in most cases only results of disaster. Only judgment, caution, and even patient waiting for the deferred returns from really wise and honest schemes, could secure those who exercised sound discretion in these ventures.

It is to the "operations," so called, connected with the processes and contracts which have thus developed the resources of our country, that we are to trace the accumulation of the vast and seemingly incalculable fortunes gathered by individuals, mostly within the last thirty or forty years. The satellites attendant upon the original, more responsible principals in these transactions have turned them to account in incidental ways, the most noteworthy of which is known under the technical term of "cornering." If the writer — not an expert — understands its signification, it means the securing, or at least the attempting to secure, the sole mastery of some form of stock or some product. The writer once had pointed out to him, among the fashionables on the avenue at Newport, an individual distinguished as having "cornered all the lard in the country."

The class of men, mixed in all the degrees and shades of

integrity, intelligence, shrewdness, capacity, nobleness, and less reputable qualities of character, who are concerned in the various lines of business just referred to, are designated by the comprehensive epithets of "bankers and brokers." They are as essential and as useful in our prosperous communities as is a system of water-works, with its contributing springs and water-courses, its reservoirs and its distributing and service pipes. They gather and they divide. They make what is of value here available in any part of the globe, either through the medium of a piece of paper or by a message sent under the ocean currents. Furnish them with seed that has life in it, and they will anticipate for you its deferred harvest. Like the clouds which retain the gathered vapors of the earth, while sometimes chargeable for droughts or freshets, they hold in control the floating wealth of a people; and an ideal theory would make every one a sharer in it.

Of the risks, mischances, and catastrophes attendant upon the "operations" just referred to, there is no occasion or place for mention here. One might compare the disasters and wrecks that have followed some forms of speculation on land to those which occur on the ocean, only we should need to substitute human for elemental agencies. Of the schemes which have been devised in fraud or folly, or those which, by individual or combined greed, have used the community and the rights of all as puppets, and of those which, on occasions, in their exposure and general ruin have shaken confidence in all business enterprise, we have had a woful instance, sufficient as a warning for all time, in the trick played upon so many victims, but notably upon the victorious leader of our patriot armies and the chief magistrate of our country.

It is a relief to turn from a passing reference to these abuses of a needful and honorable method of business, to recognize the success in it of the brothers Thayer. As the scope of transactions and the volume of enterprises extended in the charge of the surviving partner, the fluctuations and uncertainties attendant upon them involved risks, not only for

Mr. Thayer himself, but for those who followed his lead or judgment, which certainly was not infallible. It is not for the writer of these pages, unskilled or incompetent in such matters of business, to make statements or comments on Mr. Thayer's personal transactions, or on those which he shared with others, in the large enterprises, often complicated by uncertainties and by rival schemes, in the development of our vast railroad system. There were many who profited largely by their participation in them with him. Some of these, of course, had to share the disappointment or loss of occasional temporary or permanent defaults, and when unable or disinclined to wait for deferred results, — which Mr. Thayer confidently, and, as it generally proved, justly believed would be satisfactory, — forgot former obligations to him.

Of one fact incident to investments where the risks run parallel with large promised or expected returns, the writer has personal knowledge. Very many of the societies holding funds for our numberless charitable organizations, while always safely depending upon him for most generous gifts, naturally sought to avail themselves of his financial skill as their treasurer. He accepted many such trusts. In every case the funds increased largely in his hands, as he invested them in securities which his judgment approved, and to which he committed his own property. When, as occasionally happened, there was a default in the periodical return from one or another of these investments, he would pleasantly drop the remark, "I have so much of this that I may as well have more," and assuming the obligation he charged himself with the full sum in his account. And when he made over any such trust, his successor received only the most satisfactory and well-certified securities.

It is more within the province and to the purpose of the present writer to show how the wealthiest of our citizens used the wealth of which, as he well said, he was simply put in trust, not in the absolute ownership. The accumulation during the last few years of enormous fortunes by individuals

favored in the general enrichment of our country, has opened many discussions, some of which are of the placid sort of quiet moral essays, and others of which are portents of communism and social convulsion. The common text of these discussions is, that the whole community has a claim upon a partition of the vast hoards which have been accumulated by individuals. Nor will any generous and right-minded person dispute that general statement, if he is permitted to make certain limitations and conditions. But it is spoken freely and boldly now as true and reasonable, when wholly unqualified. The public demand on the estate of a rich man after his decease is well-nigh as exacting as is that of the assessor of taxes during his life. When, in the publication of the probate on his will, which often accompanies his obituary, we read, "There are no public bequests," the sentence is intended to signify the opposite of a benediction. That great constituency which is served by the newspaper expects to be informed, in all such cases, of generous distributions among good objects. Happily, there is more than one ground on which this expectation proceeds. It is prompted, if not justified, by the long and splendid succession, in this community at least, of munificent bequests left by men, not wealthy by the present standard, for endowing the almost numberless objects and institutions among us for all the noble interests of humanity. If only the teaching by such examples was the ground of public demand or expectation of like generosity, it would stand approved. If one should examine the treasurers' books of our various corporations and trusts, to gather from them the gross sum of what is now held by the dead hands of public benefactors for public uses, he would learn an impressive lesson. Indeed, some grievances have already found expression over the amount of such property that is exempted from taxation to increase the public burden. It is also a matter of wonder that while States and municipalities are incurring vast debts to be paid by posterity, we are relieving it of the duties of charity and mercy by large endowments of benevolent institutions.

There is, however, quite another ground than the examples of generosity in previous bequests on which rests the popular expectation — we may well call it the popular demand — that the estates of opulent persons should, before or after their decease, be in part distributed to objects of general improvement. It is observable by all who mark the tone and tenor of popular discussions, the rhetorical harangues of reformers, and the abounding essays upon exciting social problems, that the spirit of one type of communism among us has been intensified by the accumulation, within the last score of years, of gigantic fortunes by a few individuals. Heretofore the public was content to rest its expectations of generous bequests for its benefit upon the force of the emulation of others prompting a following of the examples of those generous benefactors who had bestowed their wealth among so many noble objects. But the demand to which we are now referring is of a more imperious tone. It seems to justify itself by pointing to the facility and the means by which stupendous fortunes have recently been acquired as involving a kind of rapacity and injustice, to be redressed only by a generous partition of the heaped-up hoards. In the obituary notice of a deceased merchant prince we used to read the stereotyped form of words, "He acquired his wealth by industry, sagacity, and strict attention to business;" but it is realized in our times that this does not tell the whole of the case as the eyes of keen observers view it. Our incipient communists argue in this wise: The attainment of enormous wealth by a few individuals in communities where there are large masses of indigent and straitened people, proves that they have turned all the resources and opportunities around them to their special service and benefit. They have seized the lion's share. The bones and muscles of vast numbers of humble toilers, men and women, are wrought into the gains of private millionnaires. Luck may be an undefined, but is still a positive element in their success. They must not only have exercised sharpness and keen calculation in their secret enterprises, but they have

also assessed the common toil, and all the activity and appliances of the whole world of life around them, in the products of the soil, the factory and the corporate agencies. The largest fortunes have been piled up by those who seem only to have been passing "paper" through their hands, with none of the difficulties and frugalities of labor. To those whose toils are hard and whose gains are slow, and whose materials are the substantial things of product and fabric, there seems something like magic or conjury in these paper manipulations of the broker or the banker, wrought in a luxurious office, with the agency of stock boards, telegrams, individual and combined speculations, and the technical terms of a trade of "bulling and bearing" wholly unintelligible except to the initiated. To the outside observer these manipulators do not appear to add to the real wealth of the world as much as does one who makes a pair of shoes, or even the pegs for putting them together.

Those who see and reason only thus may perhaps be easily led to realize how few succeed, and how many go down, fevered and crushed, in the wreck of these speculations. But this fact only makes them the more pertinacious in insisting that the few who do succeed, and that superbly, have merely got so much more exorbitant a share out of the common treasury of humanity. It is little to the purpose to suggest to these incipient communists what large part these schemers and speculators have in developing the latent wealth, the unused resources of a country, and how many of the methods by which an individual wins a million of dollars may accrue to the benefit of a million persons of the present or a coming generation. The free and bold discussions which are going on around us seem to carry with them intimations that the way in which stupendous private fortunes are turned to account here, whether for private or public ends, will have more to do in deciding many threatening social problems of our times than will any other single element the working of which we can now trace. We are warned that the thicken-

ing masses of toilers, and even of idlers, among us will not long quietly look on while a few roll up their hoards from the common fund of humanity. The spirit, the life, and the beneficence of such a millionnaire as Peter Cooper, if they could be made serviceable, not only as an example, but with the stamp of obligation, would furnish a stronger breastwork against communism than all conservative rhetoric and all police appliances.

It is agreeable to turn away from these menacing claims upon the large estates of the opulent, and to recognize as we may the sense of responsibility in some of the possessors of great wealth, like the subject of this Memoir, who find their happiness in discharging their duty by its generous distribution. Far better is it that this spirit should prompt a willing benefactor than that he should be teased or intimidated into parting with anything that he can call his own. It is observable that the hints and rude reminders which the newspapers and public declaimers address to the millionnaires of our time are not always graciously received. Those who are thus challenged plant themselves on their rights. There is something irritating to the less noble-minded of our rich men in being made to feel that the whole community is waiting in expectancy as for a division of spoils. The legal heirs of a rich man also are apt to regard his property as their patrimony. There is a marked characteristic of our times connected with the vast increase of wealth, the aspect of which is very interesting. On many grounds we may call our era one of general benevolence, of generous and lavish giving. Those who have the means of knowing and observing what is going on publicly and privately around us might infer that we have a considerable number of persons, philanthropists and schemers, who are plying their ingenuity in devising objects and occasions for assessing a class of the community for daily contributions for a most miscellaneous mass of uses, most of them self-approving, though some may be fanciful. Institutions, colleges, libraries, hospitals, statues, testimonials, and memo-

rial tributes, funds for the relief of sufferers by famine, flood, fire, earthquake, and pestilence, have their solicitors on every hand and in every place. The shrewd among these solicitors are curiously wise, through experience, in judging whether an appeal for this or that object had best be made at places of business, in homes, or in churches, of men or of women, through public meetings or by quiet perseverance. The labor-saving of these canvassers have learned to provide themselves with lists from the papers of "those who are in the habit of giving," instead of taking their chance in a general and haphazard tour of solicitations. Under these circumstances it is not strange or unreasonable that some persons of wealth and of a liberal spirit should be annoyed by these incessant demands, and should decline to meet some of them at the risk of being reproached for stinginess. We are reminded also that it is neither in good taste nor right to pronounce strong encomiums even upon the most generous who give out of their abundance, inasmuch as they thus deprive themselves of not a single luxury, while generous giving purchases them a new pleasure in repute. Yet, while the recognition of generosity in rich men may not be eulogistic, it should be responsive and appreciative on good reasons. Three of these reasons are strong ones. First, there are men of wealth who repel all these demands upon them in life, and in death leave "no public bequests." Second, if, as is said, the passion for gaining and keeping grows by accumulation, it is creditable to those who freely part with large sums that they resist this passion. And third, it is by the munificence of men of wealth that many noble enterprises and institutions of the highest public value, which may not legally be initiated or maintained by a tax or a draft on the treasury, have been planted, fostered, and endowed among us. The direct gifts to Harvard College from the public treasury, from its foundation till such donations ceased, amounted to a quarter of a million of dollars, besides exemption from taxation. Its noble accumulations and endowments, halls, libraries, and apparatus, and vested

funds, represent hardly less than ten millions of private gifts. While we are restive under the burden of taxation in this city, we may remind ourselves that the sum of it is well balanced in amount by the income of funds munificently given to support institutions in whose privileges we all share.

There is an alternative of methods by which our rich men have recognized their obligations to this community and to many benevolences beyond it. One is by bequests to take effect when they part with all they have. The other is by anticipation during their lives. Mr. Thayer felt profoundly, and cheerfully recognized, the responsibility and obligations of wealth. While he determined to leave to his heirs the means of imitating his own generosity, instead of so distributing his property as to lead them to feel that he had relieved them of such duty, he preferred to give in his lifetime and enjoy the sight of his good works. Though his early years were of frugal surroundings, and his first mercantile occupations were little more than remunerative, his mature life was one of vast and sunny prosperity. He was generous always according to his means, and his generosity kept even proportions with his accumulations. Some of its channels, by no means exhaustively, may now be traced.

Mr. Thayer was elected a Fellow of the Corporation of Harvard College in 1868. This was a most exceptional honor to be conferred on one not a graduate; for from the earliest times that the College had alumni, it had found among them those who could wisely and intelligently administer its interests. The most conspicuous person who had, previously to Mr. Thayer, shared that exceptional honor, was the eminent mathematician Dr. Nathaniel Bowditch. There were reasons that warranted the election of Mr. Thayer. He had proved in many ways his interest in the College, its objects, officers, and students, all of whom had profited by his generosity in a variety of gifts. And as the funds of the College were rapidly increasing, it was the more needful that there should be among the Fellows, as there always had been, one or more

skilled in finance and the management of trusts. Till he resigned his place in 1875, the institution had many occasions for valuing his services and offerings. The whole amount of the pecuniary gifts of Mr. Thayer to the College, its objects and resources, its officers and students, can never be known, as he himself kept no full record of them, and as many of his incidental benefactions were mingled in the general outpouring of his most miscellaneous and comprehensive charities. Though the writer of these pages might, from the materials in his hands, make some approximate estimate of special and united sums, he prefers not to do so. The generous spirit, always hearty and genial in tone, method, and accompaniment, which prompted these benefactions, is the main point to be held in regard. A brief mention of some prominent in the series and variety of these gifts may be suggestive to the reader of the cost involved in them. The writer was let into the knowledge that, at one period at least, Mr. Thayer kept three sets of check-books, answering to three banks of deposit. One of these had reference to his purely business affairs, one to his personal and domestic expenses, and the third to his charities. In cases where very large sums were involved, this distribution might not always be regarded, and the sums which came directly from his pocket left no vouchers. The writer recalls some incidental remarks made by Mr. Thayer to him, when, after the decease of his brother partner, he realized that he was the possessor of a fortune, trifling, however, in amount to what afterwards came to him. They were in substance these: "A power of money has come to my hands; and I mean that it shall give me happiness, if it be in the power of money to yield it. That it may do so, I realize that I must share it and do some good with it. But I must have advice and help. I am beset by all sorts of applicants and importunities, in person and by letter, so that I am impeded in my privacy and business with my own affairs. Some of these applicants and their objects are of the best, but I am not always able or at leisure to discriminate them. I receive many canting letters, — 'The

Lord has made you his steward,' etc." The aid which he solicited was through his permission given to some of his intimate friends, in various ranges and associations of life, to present to him with confidence of fit response any worthy object for which they could themselves answer. True to his reverential regard for his father and his father's profession, the pet objects of the son's sympathies were impoverished and disabled ministers. It was well understood by his intimates that if either of them knew a young man of promise otherwise unable to enter or complete his course in college, the means would be abundantly furnished. All through the remainder of his life this was a favorite direction of his benevolence, and the gifts were not stinted. Many young men were supported by him through their whole college course. He expected his sons, when in college, to follow his example in all considerate ways.

The most practically efficient of some of Mr. Thayer's devices for serving a class of students was that known as "Thayer Commons," something of which sort was made necessary when, before the establishment of the capacious dining-room in the Memorial Hall, the College, having abandoned its former provision, had left the students to the mercies of outside boarding-houses. The following graphic sketch of Mr. Thayer's device is furnished me by the Rev. Dr. A. P. Peabody, a friend greatly revered and loved by Mr. Thayer, and one of those who shared confidentially in the partition of his generosity: —

CAMBRIDGE, April 6, 1883.

MY DEAR DR. ELLIS, — The origin of the boarding club at Cambridge was on this wise. I was spending a week at Lancaster, and in driving with Mr. Thayer one day, I told him of the hardships which I had discovered in some cases to be endured by students who undertook to board themselves. He at once told me that if I could make any arrangement for cheap board at cost, he would furnish the fund. There was a building, originally a railway-station, but then occupied in part by me for evening religious meetings, and in part by the "queen-goody" of the College. The Corporation gave the building up to me. I made the

queen-goody cook of the establishment, procured the requisite kitchen equipment and furniture, tables, seats, dishes, etc., costing in the whole more than a thousand dollars. We thus were able by crowding to accommodate some fifty or sixty students, while as many were excluded as could be admitted. The plan then was started of building in the rear of the rooms thus occupied, a dining-hall. For that a subscription paper was started, and a few hundred (less than a thousand) dollars subscribed. Mr. Thayer assumed the cost of building, which, with the requisite furnishing and a large increase of kitchen plenishing, amounted to seven or eight thousand dollars. His expenditure in the whole must have been not less than seven thousand, and it was all that I asked for, and would have been twice or thrice as much, had I asked for it. As for the subscription, it was not started because he wanted that it should be, but because Ingersoll Bowditch was interested in the plan, wanted to do something for it, got up the paper himself, and was the only subscriber to it whom I can recall, probably the only one who gave more than a pittance.

Ever truly yours,

A. P. Peabody.

This "Thayer Commons" was, at its institution, and for the term of its continuance, one of the most useful and highly appreciated of all the general provisions made for the welfare and comfort of a large number of the students of the College. It combined felicitously the principles of self-support and a generous subsidy for necessary deficiencies. Even its limitations were among its advantages. That twice as many applied for admission as could be received into it assured to it a privileged character. The patronage and oversight which it enjoyed made its generous management a certainty. From the first years of the College, when the students brought their dippers to the buttery hatch to receive weak beer and hard bread, down through the Commons in University Hall, when there was no gymnasium to help the processes of digestion, young appetites and their supplies were not always in amicable relations. Mr. Thayer's provision was a triumph till the dining-room in Memorial Hall superseded it. Dr. Peabody could have well extended his narrative by references to the incidental favors which circumstances led Mr.

Thayer to proffer to many of those who fed at his well-served tables.

Through the kindness of President Eliot of Harvard College, the writer has been furnished with a copy, from the records of the Corporation, of the documents relating to that munificent donation to the College which bears the name of "Thayer Hall." The accession of Mr. Eliot to the Presidency, soon after Mr. Thayer's election as a Fellow, was immediately followed by a rapid renewal and expansion of all the interests of the University, — in engaging for it the quickened regard of its large constituency, in extending the scope of its activity in all its departments, in adding to the compass of its curriculum and the number of its officers and instructors, and especially by a sudden increase in the number of students joining its academic and its professional departments. Of course a corresponding and a large increase of its funds, and equally a multiplication of its halls, became very pressing wants. The supply of these wants was as liberally furnished as it was confidently expected. Mr. Thayer took the lead in the series of these benefactions. The following items from the records of the Corporation show the initiation and the completion of his design: —

"July 31, 1869. *Voted*, That the President and Messrs. Thayer and Lowell be a committee to consider the expediency of erecting a new dormitory, and procure plans and estimates if they see fit.

"Sept. 25, 1869. The committee on the expediency of erecting a new dormitory presented a report recommending the immediate erection of such a building. Whereupon it was *Voted*, To proceed forthwith to the erection of a new dormitory, according to the plans of Messrs. Ryder & Harris, and under their superintendence.

"*Voted*, That the sum of the tenders of contract upon the said building, and of the commissions chargeable upon the same, be limited to $100,000.

"*Voted*, That the committee appointed July 31, 1869, be empowered to fix the site of the new building, and carry the above votes into execution."

A letter to the writer from President Eliot may be introduced here, as relating particulars of interest: —

CAMBRIDGE, April 22, 1883.

MY DEAR SIR, — In reply to your inquiry of April 3d, I have much pleasure in giving you all the information which I possess concerning Mr. Nathaniel Thayer's greatest benefaction to the College, — Thayer Hall.

In June, 1869, a few weeks after I became President, Mr. Thayer told me, at his office in Sears Building, that he thought the College ought to have another dormitory, the rents of which should be applicable to any college use, at the discretion of the Corporation, and that he meant to see that it was shortly built. Being a member of the Corporation at the time, he knew that unrestricted income was the great need of the College, and he was also aware that more students' rooms in the College Yard were desirable, in order that the prices of rooms in the town might be kept within reasonable limits. At the end of July a committee of the Corporation was appointed (Mr. Thayer being one of the committee) to consider the expediency of erecting a new dormitory, and to procure plans if they saw fit. Mr. Thayer selected as architect, Mr. Edward D. Harris, junior member of the firm of Ryder & Harris, of Boston, and a son of Thaddeus William Harris, a former Librarian of the University. In making this choice Mr. Thayer told me that he was influenced by early friendship for the Harris family. The plans of the building were prepared during the summer; near the end of September the Corporation voted to proceed forthwith to the erection of a new dormitory, and early in October the foundations were begun. Cold weather stopped the work at the first floor. Work was resumed as early as possible in the spring, and was prosecuted vigorously, with the intention of getting the building ready for occupation by Oct. 1, 1870, and so securing the rents of the rooms for the academic year 1870–71. This object was accomplished, but to the injury of the wood-work of the interior, much of which was put in before the plastering was thoroughly dry.

The main object which Mr. Thayer had in view was to secure a solid and durable building (almost all the interior partitions are of brick) with a considerable rental and accommodations for a large number of students. He deliberately preferred a plain building to an ornate but smaller one, on the ground that the College would get an advantage proportionate to the capacity of the Hall. The proceedings of the Corporation on the subject (a copy of which I enclose) give the impression

that at the start the Corporation expected to pay part of the cost of the Hall; but before the plans and specifications were completed it became perfectly understood that Mr. Thayer meant to pay the whole cost. He made all the contracts and paid all the bills himself, including the bills for the necessary grading about the building.

I never knew the exact cost of the whole work to Mr. Thayer, but it was not less than $100,000.[1] The College had never before received so great a gift from a single benefactor, or a wiser gift from any source. The example set by Mr. Thayer has been followed, within twelve years, by Mr. Matthews, Mr. Weld, Mr. Hemmenway, Colonel Sever and Mrs. Sever, and the anonymous givers of the new Law School and the new Physical Laboratory. Mr. Thayer's objects have been perfectly attained. Nearly one hundred students live in Thayer Hall, and the Corporation get from it a net income of about $8,000 a year.

I am very glad that Mr. Thayer's life is to be carefully and thoroughly written. It is good for the community, and particularly for young men, that such a life should be held in honorable remembrance.

Believe me, my dear sir, with great respect,

Very truly yours,

CHARLES W. ELIOT.

Rev. GEORGE E. ELLIS, D.D.

Continuing the extracts from the records of the Corporation, we have the following, Jan. 14, 1870: —

BOSTON, Jan. 10, 1870.

To the President and Fellows of Harvard College:

GENTLEMEN, — As stated in the report of the Committee upon a new Dormitory, dated Sept. 25, 1869, I agreed to pay the first fifty thousand dollars which might be called for. I now agree to pay the entire cost of the building, as the money may be wanted.

My object in doing this is not simply to meet a great want of the College at this time, but also as a testimony of respect to the memory of my much-loved and honored father, Nathaniel Thayer, D.D., who was a graduate of, and for some time an instructor in, the College; and also to that of my brother John Eliot Thayer, who showed in various ways his interest in the College, and especially in establishing the scholarships bearing his name.

With much respect, yours truly,

N. THAYER.

[1] It considerably exceeded that sum.

THAYER HALL, HARVARD UNIVERSITY.

Whereupon it was —

Voted, That the munificent offer of Mr. Thayer be gratefully accepted, and that the President make suitable acknowledgment thereof.

Voted, That the new dormitory be named Thayer Hall.

Voted, That the Building Committee be directed to place in the vestibule, or other suitable position, a tablet with an inscription expressive of the memorial design contemplated by Mr. Thayer.[1]

In the preceding letter Mr. Thayer makes a reference to the interest and generosity shown towards the College by his brother. By his will, executed in 1855, to three trustees named, and their successors, Mr. John Eliot Thayer says : —

"I give the sum of fifty thousand dollars, to pay the income of and from said sum to the ten most meritorious scholars in Harvard University every year, etc. I had intended to have given to the University a very large sum, and indeed in a former will which I had made had done so; but I have seen, for the last few years, a constant disposition among politicians and certain sectarians to get possession of the same, which I have no doubt will greatly injure the same," etc.

The reference here is to that inauspicious period in the history of the College, when the Legislature, having induced a change in the mode of electing the members of the Board of Overseers of Harvard College, had taken the task and office into its own hands. Parties and sects demanding a representation on the Board exposed the College to all the contentions and rivalries of political management. Mr. Thayer's intended bequests were not the only gifts which were lost to the College at that period. The extraordinary prosperity of the University in recent years has found one among the several occasions of it in the abandonment of that political

[1] The tablet bears this simple inscription : —

THIS HALL IS ERECTED BY
NATHANIEL THAYER
IN MEMORY OF HIS FATHER,
NATHANIEL THAYER, D.D.
AND OF HIS BROTHER,
JOHN ELIOT THAYER.
1870.

method of mischief, and the committal of the institution to the oversight of its own alumni.

Professor Asa Gray has furnished the writer with some of the particulars connected with another of Mr. N. Thayer's benefactions to the University, — namely, his provision of a fireproof Herbarium, with furnishings and library, in connection with the Botanic Gardens. This was one among the many objects and directions of Mr. Thayer's generosity, in which, while starting with a will and expectation of co-operating with others in instituting or advancing some special design, he found himself led on, by circumstances of his own prompting, to do the whole, and even then to be ready to meet the incidental consequences in the development of methods and necessities. The solid and well-protected brick structure for the Herbarium cost about $12,000. It needed an elaborate system of cases and drawers; then an addition to its library; then the Garden itself drew on him for its restoration, in the amount of $5,000. Only his own private papers would show the whole cost of his offering to the collection and preservation of Flora. One of the courtesies which generous givers among us are learning to observe towards each other is shown in hesitating to supplement each other's gifts by additions of their own to the deposit. When a new scheme or object has found its first advocate or pecuniary supporter, the new courtesy seems to suggest that he have the whole burden and credit of it. This certainly was illustrated in the next of Mr. Thayer's generous deeds.

Under the name of the "Thayer Expedition," rightly so called, because it was prompted, and so far as private liberality was engaged, was wholly sustained, at the charge of the subject of this Memoir, appreciative notice must here be taken of a most successful enterprise of world-wide interest to scientists and naturalists. The expedition combined in equal portions the lofty and chivalrous enthusiasm of Professor Louis Agassiz, and the unstinted generosity of Mr. Thayer. And it may be added that Mr. Thayer himself acted under the double

THAYER HERBARIUM, HARVARD UNIVERSITY.

inspiration of his interest in science and his admiration and love for the great naturalist. If either of these impulses had the predominance in Mr. Thayer's motives, it was doubtless his response to the magnetic and kindling enthusiasm of Mr. Agassiz. The objects of the expedition, as set forth by the Professor, might naturally, to a man not a scientist, be secondary to his confidence that one who was a master in all the lore of Nature would be sure to turn to highest account any opportunity offered to him. Mr. Thayer, being eminently a practical man, might well have found many other objects of a strictly scientific character to engage his interest; and his well-established repute for lavish patronage of the most miscellaneous utilities never left him unsolicited for pecuniary favors. Indeed, when the results of the expedition came to be reported, he found matter for his hearty humor in the marvellous superabundance of thousands of specimens of grotesque and inedible fishes, which, having been drawn from their native element, required quite another liquid for their preservation. Mr. Thayer's intimates will recall the amusement he found for himself and them, when he would express a sort of penitence for having been concerned in drawing out so many briny creatures from the sea, the penalty being the obligation to furnish a seeming ocean of alcohol for their future nourishment. A suggestion of the measure of this exaction may be gathered from the following extract of a report of Professor Agassiz in 1869. He had asked of his assistants a count of all the glass jars of fishes already put up with specimens in alcohol. The return was, "fifteen thousand two hundred and forty-two jars, of all sizes, from the smallest, three inches high by one inch in diameter, to the largest, three feet high by nine inches in diameter, containing each from one to fifty and more specimens, and occasionally even several hundreds. And yet this is by no means half of the collection. The rest remain for the present piled up in tanks, kegs, cans, earthen jars, and other vessels." It was this last half that Mr. Thayer thought so unconscionably craving of the costly liquor.

A slight relief was found in procuring from Congress an act to remit the excise duty on alcohol for scientific purposes.

But this is in anticipation of our theme. Mr. Thayer was easily drawn to a generous interest in all scientific pursuits. In his later years he often expressed in substance the following views: As wealth and the opportunities for a life of leisure and wide culture increased in this community, numbers of young men would come into the inheritance of fortunes exempting them from dependence upon mercantile and professional pursuits. It was desirable to engage their interest in studies and investigations which, though they might very rarely be found to be pecuniarily profitable, would be refining and elevating. Mr. Thayer recognized in Mr. Agassiz a man of grand genius, of noble capacities, of full-hearted devotion to his science, and of a wholly unselfish aim in its pursuit; who would receive no place or office, gift or present, as of personal use or reward, but would plead and even with dignity beg for the patronage of science. Mr. Thayer thought it was an honor to our country that Mr. Agassiz should transfer his citizenship to it for life, and should reject the solicitations of Louis Philippe to accept high position and service in France. There is a noble sentence from the pen of Agassiz, which expresses the scope and inspiration of his aim. He said the time had passed when men manifested their religious zeal in such works as the Cathedral at Cologne and the Basilica of St. Peter's, and added: "It is my hope to see, with the progress of intellectual culture, a structure arise among us which may be a temple of the revelations made in the material universe, to embrace the infinite work of the Infinite Wisdom." (Report for 1869.)

Mr. Agassiz had procured in 1859, with large subsequent help from State grants, as well as from individuals, the founding of the Museum of Comparative Zoölogy, in connection with Harvard College. The Professor's ideal of this institution, and his prophecy and conviction of what it would grow to be, were, from the first, of the loftiest, and all-comprehensive. He

saw it, and not in a very distant future, rivalling and outreaching the grandest museums of Europe, which had monarchs for their patrons, national treasuries for their support, and the most eminent *savans* for their servants. Certainly, if the development of the institution, the extending sweep of its buildings, and the busy workers engaged in it, — men and women, — may serve as tokens, his vision was of realities. Still, though the grand liberality of his son, enriched by the proceeds of a gold mine which yields only copper, has given to the institution more than all that it had before received from all sources, even to a sum exceeding half a million dollars, it has its aim still only in an advanced stage of progress.

Professor Agassiz was the Director of this Institution, and Mr. Thayer was the Treasurer of the Corporation, at the time now to be noted in the history of the Thayer Expedition. All who have been associated with Mr. Thayer in the various societies of which he was the treasurer well know what advantage accrued to their funds. One of the fruits of the Thayer Expedition is a volume bearing the following title: "A Journey in Brazil, by Professor and Mrs. Louis Agassiz. Boston: Ticknor & Fields. 1868." The contents of the book are mainly from the journal of Mrs. Agassiz. One of the services of the wife on the journey is expressed in the following lines from Longfellow, quoted on the titlepage: —

> "And whenever the way seemed long,
> Or his heart began to fail,
> She would sing a more wonderful song,
> Or tell a more marvellous tale."

The dedication of the volume is —

"To Mr. Nathaniel Thayer, the Friend who made it possible to give this Journey the character of a Scientific Expedition, THE PRESENT VOLUME is Gratefully inscribed."

In simple and graceful sentences the Professor relates the circumstances which led to the expedition. In 1865 he had felt it necessary to seek relief from the strain and weariness of

work, and recuperation of health by change and motion. His thoughts and longings turned to the study of the Fauna of Brazil, particularly as its enlightened and generous Emperor had previously expressed his sympathy with Agassiz, and had sent valuable collections to the Museum at Cambridge. But the distance of space, the expense of time, the lack of pecuniary resources, and the necessity of providing for competent scientific assistants and companions to aid his single-handed efforts, were formidable obstacles in the way. The words of this earnest seeker must be quoted here:—

"While I was brooding over these thoughts I chanced to meet Mr. Nathaniel Thayer, whom I have ever found a generous friend to science. The idea of appealing to him for a scheme of this magnitude had not, however, occurred to me; but he introduced the subject, and after expressing his interest in my proposed journey, added, 'You wish, of course, to give it a scientific character; take six assistants with you, and I will be responsible for all their expenses, personal and scientific.' It was so simply said, and seemed to me so great a boon, that at first I hardly believed I had heard him rightly. In the end I had cause to see in how large and liberal a sense he proffered his support to the expedition, which, as is usual in such cases, proved longer and more costly than was at first anticipated. Not only did he provide most liberally for assistants, but until the last specimen was stored in the Museum, he continued to advance whatever sums were needed, always desiring me to inform him should any additional expenses occur on closing up the affairs of the expedition. It seems to me that the good arising from the knowledge of such facts justifies me in speaking here of these generous deeds, accomplished so unostentatiously that they might otherwise pass unnoticed." (Preface.)

What is most observable in the matter of this charming narrative from the grateful writer is the open-handed, whole-hearted spirit of the patron of this expedition. The expense of it was wholly inestimable and incalculable. A set effort to foretell its cost was utterly impracticable, as too many unknown conditions would enter into it. Not even time was defined. Not a word seems to have been said by either party on the subject. The rule of prudence on all but the most

L. Agassiz

Engraved by C. H. Jeens from a Photograph

exceptional occasions, "First count the cost," was wholly set aside. It was one of those rare free-speech contracts between good-will and confidence, the only conditions of which were honest and intelligent enthusiasm on one side, and lavish generosity on the other. As circumstances, immediately to be mentioned, which could by no means have been foreseen or calculated upon, supplied quite considerable resources for reducing the charges which would have come upon Mr. Thayer, his liberality found a limit not at all of his seeking. For many reasons this expedition was remarkable and exemplary. It was then the first, and up to this time the only, scientific enterprise, outside of our own country or even within it, sustained at the charges and by the unstinted liberality of an individual, who allowed the receiver to measure the amount by his own large aim and purpose. Mr. Thayer found his full return in every circumstance and event, every appreciative and helping agency which came in to advance the enterprise, and in its rich and auspicious results. His pleasure began in realizing, as he parted with Professor Agassiz, the radiant and beaming delight of the great naturalist, as he started to seek the improvement of his grand opportunity and the fruition of his high expectations. His trained scientific assistants were an artist, a conchologist, two geologists, an ornithologist, and a preparator. There were also six or more volunteers, with scientific tastes and other accomplishments, all of them catching the ardent enthusiasm of their leader. Among these was Stephen Van Rensselaer, the eldest son of Mr. Thayer, whose career of promise and hopefulness closed in early manhood in 1871. These assistants were sent off in groups charged with special errands and investigations on land and water in Brazil, and contributed largely to the comprehensive results of the expedition. These were by no means limited to the investigation of the fishes and the fauna of the country, but embraced in the widest compass all its products and phenomena. The favoring circumstances above referred to, which came in to supplement the free liberality of the patron of the enterprise,

were of the most helpful and auspicious character, alike gratifying to Professor Agassiz, as exhibiting a responsive sympathy in his purposes, and as largely helping to facilitate, extend, and secure the full success of the expedition. The President of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company offered to the whole party of sixteen members the hospitality of their magnificent ship the "Colorado," just then sailing from New York for the Pacific coast. She was furnished with a large aquarium on deck, and with all needful appliances and conveniences. They sailed from New York, April 1, 1865. During the three weeks' passage to Rio de Janeiro, the earnest Professor, furnished with his blackboard, delivered to his company in the cabin of the reeling and tossing vessel, lessons and instructions preparatory to the active work in which they were all soon to be engaged. The Secretary of the Navy issued general orders to all officers of the United States, to assist in the researches of the expedition and to receive and bring home its collections. More than all, the Professor at once received the heartiest co-operation and furtherance of Dom Pedro, "a sovereign as enlightened as he is humane;" and all the authorities and people of his empire proceeded to contribute all facilities and aids of hospitality and various service, making the party guests in every public conveyance. The daily journals of the Professor and of his gifted wife — a duplication of himself — are inextricably interwoven in the pages of the charming volume, "A Journey in Brazil."

The enormous collections of the expedition began to be received in Cambridge in 1866; and though the extensive spaces of the Museum for receiving and displaying them have been lengthening and broadening ever since, they are not yet all open and classified. The Professor made his first report before his return in 1867.

In the Report of the Trustees of the Museum in January, 1866, it is —

"*Ordered*, That the grateful acknowledgments of this Board be offered by the President to Nathaniel Thayer, Esq., for his munifi-

cent, kind, and well-considered arrangements, enabling Professor Louis Agassiz, in the way he most desires, and in the most efficient manner, to serve the interests of the Museum, and the cause of science, during his present absence in South America."

The Governor of Massachusetts, — then John A. Andrew, — being *ex officio* President of the Board of Trustees, was the medium for presenting its grateful acknowledgments to the Emperor of Brazil.

The writer has before him a packet of letters addressed to Mr. Thayer by Professor and Mrs. Agassiz while absent on the expedition, or in relation to subjects which engaged them in their pleasant intercourse with each other. The matter of them is too strictly private and personal to admit of their being introduced here; but they are all expressive of that warm regard and grateful appreciation of the kindness and generosity of Mr. Thayer which refined sentiment would associate with a sense of obligation. Always emphasizing the fact that Mr. Agassiz, one of the most unselfish of men, never sought or would receive gifts or tributes of a personal character, it was well known to all who knew him, that he never yielded to any show of diffidence or hesitation, whether before a committee of the Legislature or in interviews with rich men, in seeking patronage for what he represented. It was not himself, but his "science," that he would secure from starvation, and have stand forth in proper garb and surroundings. Writing earnestly to Mr. Thayer for help in obtaining some foreign scientific collection, he concludes: "As a mark of your continued friendship to me, you will excuse my constant appeals to you for aid, counsel, and comfort."

The following letter was written to Mr. Thayer by Professor Agassiz while on his expedition: —

TALCAHUANO, CHILI, April 26, 1872.

MY DEAR SIR, — While I daily think of you and yours, and feel thankful for the additional comforts you have provided for us on our journey, I reproach myself that I have not yet given you a direct sign of life; but the daily pressure of work which the riches of Nature often

make rather heavy (and, may I not add, the diminution of strength of which I have too often strong reminders) makes writing difficult for me, especially on board the ship. Indeed, I have lately felt that I would probably be more benefited by the voyage if I could make a change; and so I have decided on taking a journey by land along the foot of the Andes, with my good wife, and to join again the ship at Valparaiso. You have made this possible to me; and I love to thank you for it before even I start. I have been so unexpectedly successful in tracing the evidence of the former presence of glaciers in this part of the world, that by going a little farther inland I may add some valuable information to that which I already possess.

On the whole, our journey has been highly successful. Nature is so prolific that it is impossible for an observer to stop anywhere where special investigations have not yet been made, without making valuable additions to human knowledge. These circumstances make up for several mishaps which have befallen our ship, and would have caused the loss of much valuable time, were it not almost immaterial where we stop for collecting.

It gives me great pleasure to be able to say that I am, on the whole, much improved. And yet I feel constantly that this journey is almost too much for me, — at least, if I attempt to do all I should like to accomplish, — while little work suits me much better. This has led me to the conviction that hereafter my place is at Cambridge, in the Museum, and that I shall henceforth devote all my time to make that institution all I feel able to make it, and publish at the same time the observations I have accumulated in my note-books, which might be entirely lost unless I put them in order in time. I do not, therefore, think of extending this journey beyond its contemplated range, as I would gladly have done while I was in Brazil; but propose to be at home in Cambridge in time to attend the October meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Museum, present my Annual Report, and submit my views concerning the ultimate organization of the Museum. I am now confident that Massachusetts has one of the great museums of the world. It remains only for me so to arrange it that everybody who visits it shall carry away the same impression.

Mrs. Agassiz sends much love to you and Mrs. Thayer, to whom I beg also to be affectionately remembered. I venture to ask for it in these words, for I am constantly with you in thought and recollections.

Ever truly yours,

L. Agassiz.

Nathaniel Thayer, Esq.

AGASSIZ MUSEUM, HARVARD UNIVERSITY.

Mr. Thayer's munificent generosity for the objects which so engaged the toil and zeal of Agassiz met with much appreciative notice in Europe. The "Gesellschaft für Erdkunde," a Geographical Society in Berlin, — one of the oldest, most honorable, of the European learned societies, and, like them all, exclusive, — an association gathering such members as Humboldt, Carl Ritter, Lipsius, Dr. Livingstone, and the like, — elected Professor Agassiz and Mr. Thayer to Honorary Membership. The diploma of the latter was accompanied by a letter to him as "a high-minded friend of science."

As was intimated on a previous page, the establishment of a repute for liberality such as characterized the subject of this Memoir, was an announcement to the whole community of one to whom every good cause might confidently appeal for furtherance. Doubtful objects and importunate solicitations would not be wanting. Mr. Thayer was worldly-wise, discriminating, and independent, and knew how to refuse or mildly decline. But these were exceptional cases. It would not be consistent with a regard for the modesty and dignity which were so prominent in him to make an exposition or summary of his good and generous deeds. The list of our curiously classified institutions for every form of charity, benevolence, literary, scientific, and artistic culture, and all practical good objects and ends, is well known to be a very long one, and the solicitors for them are by no means only annual in their calls. It would be difficult to find a single one of them that was initiated without a gift of thousands from Mr. Thayer, or aided by repeated contributions lavish and heartily bestowed on the instant call. The Massachusetts General Hospital and the Children's Hospital in Boston were large sharers in his generosity. The newspapers might have kept his name in type as answering to all appeals at home and from abroad. Indeed, the announcement of a liberal gift from him appeared in the papers which noted his decease. The private pensioners on his bounty, continued on his memoranda for years, were as sure of an annual return as if they had

claims on an annuity. The genial and kindly tone and smile added a grace to his favors.

Another direction in which Mr. Thayer exercised a large liberality deserves a special mention. On a change in the ministry of the Second Church, then standing on its old site in North Boston, he connected himself, as his brother John had done, with the First Church, on its then site in Chauncey Place. The edifice there was fast becoming wholly unsuited to its purpose by the removal of its old households, the thinning of the congregation, and the conversion of the neighborhood into a crowded mart for business. It was necessary for the survival and prosperous renewal of the Society that it should prepare for a great change of place, and for the erection of a fifth edifice in succession to its first wilderness temple, rude and homely in material and structure. So long as the rich and tasteful and solid edifice of the First Church at the corner of Berkeley and Marlborough Streets shall stand, it will be a monument of the zealous perseverance and of the munificence of Mr. Thayer. He was proud of being in the direct lineage, on the maternal side, of the memorable John Cotton, the ejected rector of St. Botolph's Church in Boston, Old England, and the first associate pastor of the First Church in our Boston. He was resolved that wherever the proposed edifice should be planted it should worthily represent, amid the development of prosperity, wealth, and taste in this city, the original altar-shrine of the English colonists, and that the simple title borne for more than two and a quarter centuries should be perpetuated. At the time when measures for the removal were initiated, about 1865 and 1866, the reclaiming and occupancy of the alluvial region of the Back Bay, now covered with palatial edifices, and coursed by noble avenues, was a novel enterprise, not as yet of assured success. There were many who were not sanguine as to the occupancy and healthfulness of a region to be rescued from tidal waters for the production of a new Dutch land. The state of business and of the pecuniary interests of the community, so recently after the dis-

tractions of our Civil War, then just closed, were discouraging facts to some as affecting the prospects of a costly enterprise, with a deranged currency, a high premium on gold, and an advance upon labor and building materials. But for the hopefulness and resolve of Mr. Thayer the enterprise would have halted, perhaps to the discouragement of the purpose. And when undertaken, but for his lavish aid it would have been burdened with encumbrance; for it was a part of his resolve that when the time came for dedicating the edifice to God, it should not be mortgaged to man. He was earnest, perhaps importunate and enthusiastic, with some of his mistrusting associates. He felt assured that the plans which he projected were wise, and to those whom he failed to convince or win to it, he could but offer arguments and demonstrations. It was well understood, however, by the doubtful, that nothing on his part would be wanting to meet or avert any emergencies. He was fully justified and gratified by the result. The substitution on another site of a new place of worship revived and invigorated a wasting religious society, which, under the charge of a faithful and earnest ministry, is a centre of wide-extended Christian activity, and has the pledge of spanning the centuries. An ample space for church and chapel was provided on the new land; and appropriate structures, in all substantial solidity of material, with all fit appointments and adornments in good art and pure taste, receive only commending judgment. Mr. Thayer's contributions exceeded the sum of $75,000, nearly a quarter of the whole cost, though much wealth is represented in the Society. He erected in the church a fine memorial window to his partner brother, and an appropriate memorial of himself is about to be placed within the walls.

One of the obligations — or privileges, as it may be regarded — of the steadily decreasing proportion of our city population identified as pew-holders, responsible members, and regular attendants and supporters in our places of worship, is that of representing for our whole community, either

as willing parties or as convenient substitutes, a large part of all the religious and benevolent causes, which are incessant and multiplied in their appeals. The Christian religion invented Sunday, preaching, and the contribution-box. Those who put themselves in intimate relations with the two former of these Christian institutions become very familiar with the last of them. It is all right, and true loyalty holds the faithful to the conditions. The more we appreciate the good that is done for ourselves the more likely we are to be interested in securing the same for others. The contribution-box is in itself but an emblem. It represents, in its widest range, subscription papers, appeals of individuals and committees, and all sorts of efforts to pay debts, to prevent debts, and to fund resources. To every object connected with the welfare and religious and humane works of his church, Mr. Thayer, though wholly lacking in all limitations and motives of sectarian zeal, was promptly responsive. He was at times a committee of one, and an efficient one. Strongly attached to the simplicity and method of the liberalized Congregational form of worship under which he had been trained, — that of his father and his home, — though he in no way opposed or objected to the adoption of a form of service by a book in the First Church, he was hardly in sympathy with it. He tried to familiarize himself with the alternations of "standing up and sitting down" and with "finding the place" in the book; but the effort, he said, was not helpful to his devotions.

In his full health and vigor, Mr. Thayer enjoyed the refined pleasures, the hospitalities, and social clubs of his city life. His business interests led him to frequent and extensive journeys over the country, and he made the usual European voyages.

Mr. Thayer will always be most pleasantly remembered in his associations with Lancaster by those who were privileged to be his guests there. He was never weaned from the home of his youth, and it became more attractive and satisfying to him in his later years. The widow of Dr. Thayer spent the

remainder of her life — which closed June 22, 1857, in the same year as that of her son, John Eliot — in the old parsonage. In the kindly spirit of her relations to the parish, as the wife of its honored minister, she received, as permanent guests for her hospitality, the two young men who in succession acceded to the pastorate, till each of them had homes of their own. She found a most valued and welcome friend in that much revered and highly gifted man, scholar, divine, and poet, — the late Rev. E. H. Sears. When his failure in health compelled his resignation of office, his successor, the Rev. George M. Bartol, the present minister, was very near to her in her last years. Both the brothers, during the period of their most engrossing business life, were constant visitors to the old home, ministering to the comfort of their parents, and to that especially of the surviving mother. Though Mr. Nathaniel Thayer was for many years a citizen of Boston, he always regarded himself as belonging, through affection and inclination, to Lancaster, and in his later years transferred his citizenship to it, and assumed the duties which the relation involved. He would gladly have retained the old parsonage for his own residence had its size and condition served for his own household. When it was found necessary to raze it, he formed his plans, with the aid of his chosen architect, to replace it by a spacious and beautiful villa-mansion on the old site. He was scrupulously careful to preserve all the features of the spot and its surroundings. The old well, with its sweep, was left, sheltered by the old elms, as the central ornament of the lawn. The old trees, the oaks and the chestnuts, which his parents had found on the spot or had planted, remained. The adornments of the extended grounds are in keeping with a refined taste. The Nashua runs through the green meadows. At a convenient distance stand the extensive farm buildings, with their contents of heavy crops, the best mechanical implements, and the approved stock of cattle, the increase of which were at the service of his neighbor husbandmen far and near, to improve the breed through the

county. Mr. Thayer's mode of life here, as well as in the city, was characterized by an elegant and graceful simplicity. There was every provision and appliance for comfort and true enjoyment, with no trace of ostentation or parade, no elaborateness of equipage or liveries, — no overdoing in anything. It always seemed to his guests that their host, in many things, was regarding them rather than himself, and could on his own part dispense with much that was around him were it not that they might enjoy themselves to the fullest. Always cordial and genial in look and manner when he was in full health, he was radiant in cheerfulness and heartily responsive to mirthfulness and merriment. A guest might well recall his boyhood's freedom and helpfulness when, on his host's invitation to a lazy drive, he accompanied him to the stable, and though grooms and horses and vehicles abounded, the host would himself select his favorite animal from the stall and proceed to harness him into a favorite and well-worn buggy. The loitering drive through the wooded roads was described as "poking round." Every highway and by-path and cross-cut, near and far, over frequent bridgings of the winding water-courses; every sightly prospect, and all the local names, — as numerous as those by which the vanished Indians knew every feature of the territory, — had been got by heart by Mr. Thayer in his youth, and never lapsed from his remembrance.

Another tie which bound Mr. Thayer very strongly to Lancaster was because it continued to be the life-long residence — save for her visits to him in the winter in Boston — of his unmarried sister, Miss Mary Ann Thayer. She was eight years his elder. The relation between them was one of singular tenderness and regard, and, on his part, of deferential reverence. He seemed to transfer to her the respect and attachment which he had felt for their parents. And she was, in fact, not only to him, but to the people of the town, and especially of the parish, the representative of those parents. Slender in form, delicate in constitution, mild and gentle in

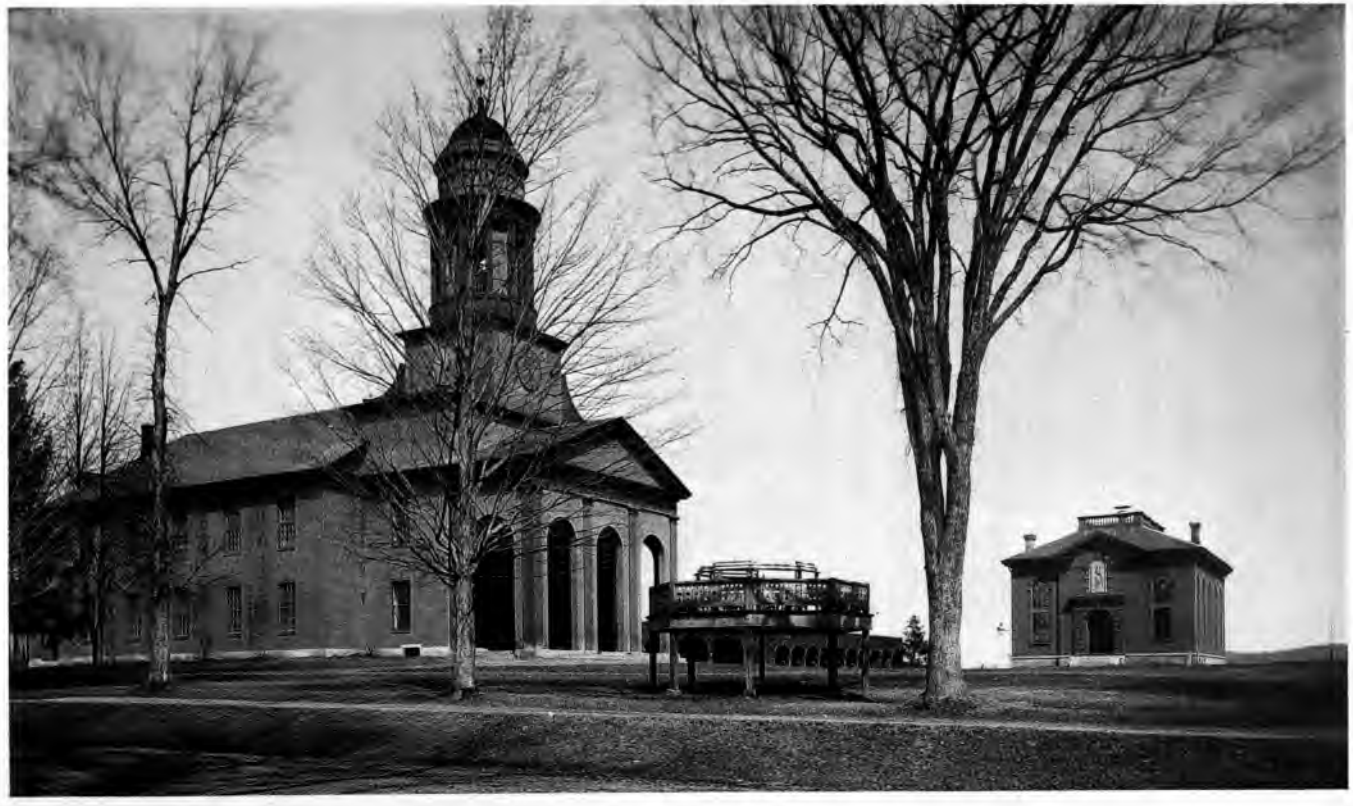
RESIDENCE OF NATHANIEL THAYER, LANCASTER, MASS.

her ways, but of great force of character, she impressed all who knew her by the graces of her simple dignity and refinement. Her own strong preferences led her to identify her whole life, which closed but a few years before that of her brother Nathaniel, with the scenes of her father's ministry. To her brother's children she filled the ideal of a beloved and fondly watchful maiden aunt. She was the good angel of the village. All cases of illness, misfortune, and want hardly needed to be reported to her, for she seemed to be the earliest to know of them, as of everything that interested or cheered the inmates of the surrounding homes. They were all sharers in her full-hearted sympathy and service. Her life closed April 17, 1876.

The guests of Mr. Thayer in his country home could not fail to note the relations of intimacy and acquaintance in which he stood with the people of the town, and with all its local interests, civil, social, domestic, and religious. It seemed sometimes as if he recognized and was acting under a sort of large and general responsibility entailed upon him by his father. Of all the residents of his own age, and in good part of their children, he knew the names, employments, and condition, and was on a footing of most cordial familiarity with them. Driving, with a visitor as a companion, by the main or cross roads, the meadows, fields, or wood-ways in the neighborhood, the farmer at the sight of him would pause in his work, come to the fence, and seem to resume some former conversation on the crops, the weather, or any matter of interest to the town. On Sunday he would loiter in the meeting-house porch or near the horse-sheds, as if one of the old-time group, at what was once the village exchange before the era of newspapers and the modern frequency of assemblings. It was pleasant to note the perfect cordiality between him and his contemporaries, who had been pursuing the current of their lives amid the quiet surroundings of those rural scenes while he had been acquiring a fortune a fragment of which would purchase all their possessions.

There was something strikingly characteristic of Mr. Thayer in the judgment and method which he followed in his various and innumerable co-operative services to his native town in all its interests and in its improvement and adornment. There was a delicate consideration to be observed in the case, the graceful regard of which by both parties could alone make their relations friendly and respectful. There are rural communities in which a native-born citizen returning to it from a very prosperous business career abroad, or an adopted resident under similar circumstances, would be a mark for envy or over-expectations. He might be welcomed as one who would relieve, if not wholly remove, all the burdens of taxation, or anticipate by lavish largesses the prosperity which can healthfully come only by time and general thriftiness. Some of Mr. Thayer's visiting companions on their drives may recall the case of a citizen, now deceased, in another town, not of marked prosperity, who was regarded as by no means a desirable member of his community. He was the richest man in it, holding mortgages on most of its farms, horses, and cattle, never relaxing his grasp on anything, and with his hands open only for more. He was looked upon, spoken of, and treated by his neighbors after the fashion in which human nature, whether corrupt or honest, will declare itself under such circumstances. The squire or millionnaire of a rural community has as much occasion for the exercise of a sound discretion as of a spirit of generosity.

The Free Academies and Libraries, the Homes and Refuges, and the ornamented grounds, which now dot our village towns over all New England, and largely over other parts of our country, are the kindly and well-appreciated deposits made by munificent men, who in their prosperity have renewed their early ties to frugal homes. It would have consisted equally with the good-will as with the resources of Mr. Thayer to have discharged in a lump all the municipal expenses of his native town, — for its highways and bridges, its schools and churches, and its poor. But his good, sound sense, and still



TOWN LIBRARY, LANCASTER, MASS.

more his respect for his townsmen, would have made such an act of assumption and folly impossible to him. His sagacity and manliness led him to a very marked method in his favors. He was careful to avoid all ostentation and show of patronage. He might sometimes have been prompted by another's hint of some desirable direction of his generosity. In most cases, if not always, the suggestion came from himself. As, however, he always wished to have the people appear as doing all that they were disposed to do in all good objects, he intimated that they would take the lead thus: "See and try what you can do yourselves, and then come to me." He assigned to them no measurement or proportion, nor did he limit the balance which would come from him. When the mania was at its height among us at the North for sprinkling over our towns, under the name of "Soldiers' Monuments," heaps of stones and statues, to be exposed on village greens to the rigors of our climate and as marks for playing children, he might have been of the same mind as Cicero, that the memorials of a civil war should be made of wood, that they might decay all the sooner. But he loved patriotism, and he would commemorate patriots in a way to promote that and other virtues. So his choice for his native town was for a free public library, with well-laden shelves, a reading-room, and all needful appliances. In this should be reared a pure white marble tablet, bearing in letters of gold the names of the honored dead, so that every youth coming for a book should have the memorial with its lesson always before him. "See what you can do about it" was his word to his townsmen. The town treasury contributed five thousand dollars to the object. Private subscriptions added six thousand more. The balance, being about two thirds of the whole cost, was defrayed by Mr. Thayer, who also funded a generous sum for its support. So too in the restoration, slating, and adornment of the substantial brick meeting-house built during his father's ministry, he added to his contribution to the work an endowment of ten thousand dollars for the parish. And in providing a new

chapel his word was repeated, "See what you can do about it;" adding, "While you are about it you had better have it done in the best manner." The balance lay with himself. He pursued the same course in the restoration, enlargement, and beautifying of the old burial-grounds, in one of which rest the remains of his parents. In his private beneficences, in a large variety of subjects and directions, he kept his own secrets. His stock farm for many uses of distribution represented what his bank of deposit did in the city. It was by these methods of a wise and generous co-operating liberality that the most cordial and mutually respectful relations existed between Mr. Thayer and his townsmen. A very impressive manifestation of their tender regard for him was shown when, on the day of his funeral from his city church, — a day of storm, of snow and rain and sleet, and of discomforts in travel, — the porch and aisles were filled by unsummoned groups of those mourning friends.

The last three years of Mr. Thayer's life, though free of any severity of pain and suffering, were attended by an enfeeblement of bodily vigor which occasionally impaired the full exercise of his mental powers. He was gentle and patient under the needful suspense of his business activity and in the seclusion of his home. His release came on the seventh day of March, 1883, at the age of seventy-four.[1]

[1] At a critical interval in Mr. Thayer's protracted illness a large committee chosen for the purpose addressed to him the following letter: —

LANCASTER, March 20, 1882.

NATHANIEL THAYER, Esq.

DEAR SIR, — Your fellow-citizens of this town have heard of your serious illness with a regret that has now deepened into painful solicitude.

Assembled in their Annual Meeting this day, they ask us to address you in their behalf.

They hereby tender to you their thankful acknowledgments of all that you have been and done, in wise counsels and in many generous gifts and endowments for the material and moral advancement of the town.

They are very sensible how much they owe to you, and in how many ways; and what reasons they have, and the generations to come after them will have, for holding your name and memory, in succession to those of your honored father and mother, in grateful pride and affection.

Mr. Thayer married, June 10, 1846, Cornelia, daughter of General Stephen Van Rensselaer, of Albany, New York. She, with two married daughters, and two married and two unmarried sons, survive him. He was interred in his lot in Mount Auburn Cemetery.

In 1881 the members of the old Congregational Parish in Lancaster erected a brick chapel of the same style of architecture as the meeting-house, to which it is attached. It bears the name of the Thayer Memorial Chapel, in grateful remembrance of Dr. Thayer and his wife, with portraits of them, and a brass memorial tablet. Since the decease of Mr. Nathaniel Thayer the parishioners have set up in it a memorial tablet to him of Caen stone.